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ABSTRACT

Past research is held to indicate a consistent relationship between participation in interscholastic athletics and educational orientations. This research is said to focus specifically on the "athletic success". Athletic success should be a stronger facilitator of the mobility attitudes of black youth, it is argued, because sports is fast becoming a viable avenue of mobility for blacks in the U.S. The data for this study come from a statewide probability sample of Louisiana high school seniors, collected in 1970. Variables incorporated in the analysis include socioeconomic status, scholastic performance, significant-other influence, athletic success, and educational aspirations. The results of a partial correlation and regression analysis are said to indicate that athletic success is significantly related to the educational aspirations for only the black respondents. This finding, along with others, is considered to lead to the conclusion that the student-athlete role provides behaviors that lead to higher-status educational orientations primarily for black youth; white youths' aspirations appear to develop more so in terms of relationships posited in current models of status attainment. Some suggestions are presented which modify achievement models for black athletes, and several alternative research strategies are outlined. (Author/JM)

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Athletic Success as a Facilitator of Adolescents' Mobility Orientations: A Black-White Comparison*

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Abstract

The role of athletic participation in facilitating social mobility attitudes has recently become an area of concern for students of the sociology of sport and social stratification. The research literature in this area documents a consistent relationship between participation in interscholastic athletics and educational orientations. Theoretical efforts in this area provide two speculative links between these variables -- "the higher academic performance" and "the leading crowd hypothesis." Studies in this area are limited, however, for two crucial reasons. First, consideration of mere participation in high s school athletics allows for a restricted assessment of the nature of the student-athlete role in facilitating mobility attitudes. Second, all studies to date have been on white youth. This research focuses on the "athletic success" rather than mere participation. The logic is that the successful athlete (i.e., the letterman, all-star, etc.) will receive more visibility, recognition and general support from sociolization mechanisms associated with the student-athlete role for continuing education beyond high school. Thus, the relationship between athletic success and educational aspiration is the one which should be investigated to adequately depict the facilitation role of athletics. Furthermore, athletic success should be a stronger facilitator of the mobility attitudes of black youth, because sports is fast becoming a viable avenue of mobility for blacks in the U.S.

The data for this study come from a statewide probability sample of Louisiana high school seniors, collected in 1970. Variables incorporated in the analysis include socio-economic status, scholastic performance, significant-other influcence, athletic success and educational aspirations. The results of a partial correlation and regression analysis indicate that athletic success is significantly related to the educational aspirations for only the black respondents. This finding, along with others, leads to the conclusion that the student-athlete role provides behaviors that lead to higher-status educational orientations primarily for black youth. White youths' aspirations appear to develop moreso in terms of relationships posited in current models of status attainment. Some suggestions are presented which modify acheivement models for black athletes and several alternative research strategies are outlined.

Athletic Success as a Facilitator of Adolescents' Mobility Orientations: A Black-White Comparison*

The role of athletic participation in facilitating social mobility patterns has recently become an area of concern for sociologists interested in the sociology of sport and social stratification. As research has progressed in these two areas, some convergence and synthesis of relationships indicates that even when relevant variables are controlled, athletic participation appears to exert an independent effect on the educational orientations of adolescents (Rehberg and Schafer, 1968; Rehberg, 1969; and Schafer and Rehberg, 1970). This paper attempts to expand recent research findings by looking at the role of athletic success (rather than athletic participation or involvement) in influencing educational orientations for both white and black students. Although sports has been traditionally viewed as an important channel of social mobility for Black-Americans, (Edwards, 1973), none of the recent sociological studies on athletic participation and educational orientations have looked at the importance of this relationship for Blacks. This lack of empirical information is crucial, for as models of the status attainment process are developed, information concerning the role of additional facilitation variables must be specified for populations other than whites in order that a thorough understanding of the dynamics of social mobility patterns in the U.S. are to be understood.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Although the overwhelming majority of studies have been conducted

on whites, a model of the status attainment process in American society is emerging. From the works of Sewell, Haller and associates, the significance of studying adolescents' educational orientations is apparent (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969; Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970; and Haller and Portes, 1973). When viewed as an attitude or part of an attitude, a person's occupational and educational aspirations have been found to be crucial predictors of eventual attainment in these status areas (Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970). As such, the specification of the dynamics or causal processes which impact on the formation of career orientations provides fundamental knowledge which aids in understanding social mobility patterns. Currently, the "Wisconsin Model" of status attainment depicts a linear three-stage transmission process (Haller and Portes, 1972). Parental status and mental ability are thought to influence performance in school and significant other influence, which, in turn, effects occupational and educational aspirations. These career orientations have been shown to have rather strong independent effects on subsequent educational and occupational attainments (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969; Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970; Haller and Portes, 1973).

The importance of the status attainment literature for our study lies in the "sensitization" these studies provide for variables which intervene between social origins and eventual attainment. Any research which attempts to assess the significance of behavioral or social psychological variables for the formation of educational aspirations should control for the effects of socioeconomic status, academic performance, and significant-other influence, since the Wisconsin Model argues that these variables impact on the educational aspirations.[1]

Although once again limited to samples of white youth, several empirical studies indicate that athletic participation has an influence on educational orientations. From their study of Pennsylvania youth, Rehberg and Schafer (1968:739) conclude:

> These data have shown that a greater proportion of athletes than non-athletes expect to enroll in a four year college, even when the potentially confounding variables of status, academic performance and parental encouragement are controlled. This relationship is especially marked among boys not otherwise disposed toward college, that is, those from working-class homes, those in the lower half of their graduating class and those with low parental encouragement to go to college.

These findings were essentially replicated by Schafer and Rehberg (1970) for a study of New York state youth and most recently by Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) for Conneticut youth. Furthermore, in the Schafer and Rehberg (1970) study it was found that athletes receive greater interpersonal encouragement than non-athletes from teachers and guidance counselors to attend college (Schafer and Rehberg, 1970:186). This finding gains added significance when it is noted that in the above studies strong interpersonal encouragement from parents, teachers and counselors to attend college were perceived by athletes least disposed to attend college,i.e., those athletes from lower class social origins and low grade point averages (Schafer and Armer, 1968; Rehberg and Schafer, 1968; and Schafer and Rehberg, 1970; Spreitzer and Pugh, 1973).

Logically, it would appear that this process is just as significant for the black athlete. Athletic participation, although not without severe limitations, has become a "traditional" avenue for social mobility for Black-Americans.[2] The black athlete should exhibit a pattern similar to

to whites in that he receives enhanced visibility and encouragement from school personnel to go to college. Additionally, the influence of athletic success on educational orientations may even be more important for black youth because of the increasing existence of numerous black athlete role-models in university and professional level sports.

Finally, in addition to the fact that there are no data in this area on black athletes, previous studies also lack an important variable which is theoretically related to the prespective presented above - athletic success. It goes without saying that not all athletes believe that they will continue their athletic behavior in college, nor do all athletes receive a similar amount of visibility and interpersonal encouragement to go on to college. In fact, the all-star or super athlete, who is a senior in high school, should logically receive more interpersonal encouragement due to the increased probability that his athletic behavior will be rewarded by some type of athletic scholarship to attend college (Schafer and Rehberg, 1970:186).

This investigation will also try to clarify several theoretical linkages proposed between athletic participation and educational orientations in other studies. These theoretical linkages both fall within the interpretive limit of status attainment theory. Rehberg and Schafer (1968:739-740) suggest that the participation aspiration relationship may be mediated by either of the following processes - "higher academic performance" and "the leading crowd association." The first linkage is rather straight forward and past studies reveal conflicting findings. Schafer and Armer's (1968) study of two mid-western high schools revealed that even after controls for relevant variables were introduced, athletes still manifested

higher grade point averages than non-athletes. However, this relationship was not replicated in a later study by Rehberg and Schafer (1968).

The second linkage, the "leading crowd association" hypothesis has yet to be adequately empirically evaluated. Although research indicates that teachers, guidance counselors and parents tend to provide more interpersonal encouragement to attend college for athletes, no data has been presented concerning the role of peer encouragement and peer modeling for athletes. Rehberg and Schafer (1968:739) note the utility of this line of inquiry for future research by stating:

> ...it remains plausible that athletes more often expect to enroll in college because, compared with others, they more often enter the leading crowd and thereby become subjected to its achievement influences. This linkage also remains a plausible interpretation of the stronger relationship between expectations and participation among less disposed boys, since, as argued earlier, they stand to gain the most from exposure to the acheivement influences of the leading crowd.

The "leading crowd association hypothesis" thus suggests that the athlete least disposed toward college attendance receives important influences from peers, which in turn, impacts upon college aspiration level. Both of the above hypotheses will be tested for black and white student athletes.

The objective of this study is therefore an assessment of these two theoretical interpretations of the athletic participation - educational aspiration hypothesis. Furthermore, we employ the variable, athletic success, rather than participation, since logically the all-star or super-athlete should receive a more intensive orientation toward college attendance (Schafer and Rehberg, 1970).

METHODOLOGY

The Sample. The data for this study are part of a larger study on achievement behavior and social mobility orientations of deep-south youth. A proportionate, stratified random cluster sample of high school seniors residing in the state of Louisiana was selected in November, 1970. All high schools within the state were stratified on the basis of residence (rural-urban), school type (public-parachoial) and senior class size (less than 100, 100-500, and over 500). A total of 3,248 students were interviewed. In this study we only report on 692 male student athletes and 892 male student non-athletes. We have in our sample 164 black student athletes and 528 white student athletes.

Variable Operationalization: The variables utilized in this study were operationalized in the following manner:

> Father's education: determined by the students' response a question which asked how many years of formal education did his father complete. Response alternatives ranged from 00 (no school) to 20 (Doctors' Degree, M.D., Ph.D., etc.)
>
> Mother's education: determined in a manner identical to father's education.
>
> School Performance: This variable was operationalized in terms of students' reports of final grade received for an exhaustive list of possible high school courses. Students' grade point averages were calculated by research workers. Actual grade point averages were obtained from school records for only 50 per cent of the sample. The zero-order correlation between actual and reported grades was found to be .788. Reported grade point average is utilized in order to minimize sample attrition.
>
> Parents' educational encouragement: determined by the students' assessment of how much encouragement he had received from his parents to attend college. Response alternatives ranged from 1 (strongly discouraged) to 5 (strongly encouraged).

Educational aspiration: This variable was obtained from student responses to the following question: "How much education do you desire and will actively attempt to acheive?" Responses were coded as follows: 0 = none after high school; 1 = graduate from a vocational-technical school; 2 = some college, but do not plan to graduate; 4 = B.A. degree; 6 = Masters' degree; 8 = Doctorate degree or equivalent professional degree (M.D., D.D.M., etc.).

Teacher's educational encouragement: Operationalized in a manner similar to parents' educational encouragement (see above).

Peer plans: determined by students' reports of how many of their friends were planning to attend college.

Athletic Success: determined by a rank-ordered set of items which resulted in the following values:

0 = did not participate in athletics
1 = did participate in athletics
2 = lettered in one or more high school varsity sports.
3 = made all-district, all regional, or all state teams in one or more varsity sports.

Statistical Analysis: The athletic success-educational aspiration relationship will be assessed through a partial correlation and regression analysis. Previous investigations have utilized partial correlation techniques to infer the "leading crowd" and "higher academic performance" hypotheses. In our analysis these techniques are employed for replication purposes, while the regression analysis will provide a basis for determining the relative effects of athletic success on aspirations.

Findings

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations for all variables by racial groups. The white respondents were found to have higher mean scores for the parents' educational attainment variables.

Furthermore white youth had higher mean levels for educational aspiration (4.08 to 3.40). The zero-order correlation between athletic success and aspirations was found to be slightly higher for the Black respondents (.19 to .16). Furthermore, athletic success was initially found to be more highly correlated with peer plans and school performance for white athletes.

(Table 1 about here)

In an attempt to more fully grasp the nature of the relationships for the control categories, a series of partial correlations were calculated and are presented in Table 2. The first order partials reveal a slight reduction in the original magnitude of the zero-order relationship when school performance is controlled for Black athletes. The original correlation was reduced .041. On the other hand, for whites, the original zero-order correlation between athletic success and aspirations was reduced by more than 50 percent when controls were applied for the peer plans variable. The second order partials reveal that when both school performance and peer plans are controlled, the success-aspiration relationship for Blacks was reduced to .128 and for whites .040. A third order partial was calculated for the three variables which were found to be most highly interrelated with success and aspirations --(1) Mother's education; (2) school performance; and (3) peer plans. The original zero-order correlation was found to be reduced approximately 34 per cent for Blacks and reduced essentially to zero for Whites.

(Table 2 about here)

The results of the partial correlation analysis indicate that the original zero-order relationship between athletic success and white youth

was accounted for by other variables for the white respondents. Specifically the "leading crowd hypothesis" appears to be a viable explanation for white respondents. The results of the first-order partials (controlling for peer plans) support this assertion. No similar trend was observed for the Black respondents. In fact, the largest reduction in the original correlation for Blacks came about when controls were exerted for school performance (.041), a trend more in the direction of the "higher academic performance" hypothesis.

An attempt to test the "interaction" effect noted for athletic participation and non-disposed athletes is presented in Table 2 (Rehberg and Schafer, 1968). All respondents were classified as being either "predisposed" or "non-disposed" toward future college attendance. The "predisposed" athlete was classified as having come from parents' with high educational achievements, had high school performance and had parents, teachers and peers who had given strong encouragement to attend college.[3] "Non-disposed" athletes were classified according to "low" states on the variables noted above. Furthermore, to facilitate comparisons across groups, non-athletes were also classified according to the criteria established for athletes. This procedure resulted in the isolation of 4 categories: (1) Predisposed Athletes; (2) Non-disposed Athletes; (3) Predisposed Non-athletes; and (4) Non-disposed non-athletes. The mean level of educational aspiration for each of these groups is presented in Table 3, by race. For both Black and White predisposed athletes, higher level educational aspirations obtained in contrast to non-athletes. The magnitude of the difference in aspiration level between predisposed athletes and non-athletes was greater for the Black respondents. However, white athletes and non-athletes classified

as predisposed had higher level educational aspirations than their Black counterparts.

(Table 3 about here)

Turning our attention to the non-disposed categories in Table 3, it is obvious that for both Black and White control categories, non-disposed athletes have higher level aspirations than their non-athlete counterparts. The magnitude of the mean aspiration levels was greater within the White control category. However, non-disposed Black athletes had slightly higher aspirations than non-disposed White athletes. These results indicate that both Black and White athletes who are not supported by social origins, school performance and the influence of significant-others to attend college tend to higher-level educational aspirations than their non-athlete counterparts. However, it should be noted that a similar trend was observed for predisposed athletes. That is, athletes who received strong support, in terms of high states on the control variables, manifested higher-level aspirations than their non-athlete counterparts. This trend was also observed for both control categories.

For an accurate interpretation of these results, we must provide a substantive interpretation of the mean scores. For both Black and White predisposed athletes, the mean educational aspiration levels indicate that these respondents hold aspirations which include graduating from college (B.A. degree). For predisposed non-athletes, the mean value for Blacks indicates college attendance, but not graduation. For Whites predisposed non-athletes, their mean value is indicative of college graduation (B.A. degree). For both Black and White non-disposed athletes, their mean aspiration levels suggest that they do plan to attend college, but that they

do not plan to graduate. On the other hand, the non-disposed non-athletes have aspiration levels that preclude college attendance.and reflect maximumly only vocational training after high school graduation.

These results suggest that the non-disposed athlete in both racial categories is oriented toward attending college, but not graduating. This finding may be indicative of an educational orientation based primarily on athletic participation. These athletes may be planning on pursuing athletic careers in college, rather than pursuing a degree. The difference observed between "predisposed" Black athletes and non-athletes is rather interesting, indicating that the black athlete with structural, behavioral and interpersonal support to attend college manifests higher-status educational aspirations than his non-athlete counterpart. Both groups desire college attendance, but more athletes aspire to graduate. These findings suggest that the athletic participation has a similar positive influence on the educational aspiration levels of both predisposed and non-disposed Black athletes.

In order to get a more accurate estimation of the independent effect of athletic success on educational aspirations, a regression analysis was conducted. Unstandardized and standardized (parentheses) coefficients are presented in Table 4 to facilitate comparisons between and within control categories (Blalock, 1967; Schoenberg, 1972). The predictor variables were found to account for 30 and 38 per cent of variance in aspirations for Black and White respondents, respectively. As would be expected from the partial correlation analysis, athletic success was found to have a significant effect on educational aspirations only for the Black respondents. Of the

three predictor variables obtaining significance for Blacks, athletic success was found to manifest the smallest standardized coefficient. Across control categories, the effects of mothers' and fathers' education and parents' educational encouragement obtained significance for Whites, but not Blacks. Some evidence does exist concerning the lack of a social origins-aspiration relationship for Blacks (Cosby and Picou, 1973) and the rather large sample size of whites must be considered in interpreting these findings. The lack of parents' encouragement for significantly effecting aspiration levels of the Black respondents should also be viewed with caution since the original zero-order correlation between these variables was similar for both control categories (.20 Blacks vs. .25 Whites). The results of the regression analysis suggests that athletic success has a significant effect on Black youths' levels of educational aspiration, net of the influence of variables utilized in currently accepted models of the status attainment process. No similar trend was observed for White respondents.

(Table 4 About here)

Conclusions

The results of our statistical analysis suggest that the "leading crowd association" hypothesis is a viable theoretical interpretation of the athletic success-aspiration relationship for White youth. When controls were exerted for the variable peer plans, the athletic success-aspiration relationship was significantly reduced. Furthermore, with the addition of the school performance variable as a control, this relationship was essentially reduced to zero for White youth. Successful White athletes appear to associate with peers who plan to attend college, and in turn athletes benefit from this

exposure to achievement influences.

This theoretical interpretation was found not to hold for Black athletes, however. The zero-order correlation between peer plans on athletic success was substantially larger for Whites (.22), in contrast to Blacks (.08). Accordingly, applying similar controls in the partial correlation analysis for Blacks did not substantially reduce the original success-aspiration relationship. Furthermore, the results of the regression analysis indicated that athletic success had a significant direct effect on aspirations for Black respondents. In terms of the variables utilized in this study and current status attainment theory, it appears that athletic success promotes high status aspirations directly for Black youth. As such, it can be contended that athletic success may be a facilitation variable for status attainment (in terms of impacting on aspiration formation) for only Black youth. Further substantiation of this thesis was found in the analysis of predisposed and non-disposed respondents. For the predisposed athlete-non-athlete comparison among Blacks, athletes were found to have substantially higher levels of educational aspiration. This finding has not been reported in previous investigations of White athletes.

In summary, this study indicates that current status attainment theory appears to incorporate variables which allow for an explaination of previous findings concerning athletic participation and educational aspirations for White youth. However, athletic success appears to have independent significant consequences for facilitating higher levels of educational aspiration for Black youth. In terms of the acheivement process of Black

youth, athletic success may impact on self-esteem or self-concept fromation, indirectly supporting higher level aspirations through a more social psychological avenue. It also appears equally plausible to assert that athletic success is viewed as a highly valued and available channel for social mobility in the Black community; consequently, achievements (success) in athletics directly promote the setting of higher status aspirations, which, in turn, have significant effects on achievement. A modification or expansion of current models of status attainment for Black youth appears plausible in light of the implications of our empirical analysis.

Footnotes

[1] In addition to the work noted above, numerous studies have demonstrated empirical relationships between socioeconomic status and educational orientations (Sewell, Haller and Strauss, 1957; Sewell and Shah, 1968; Picou, 1973) academic performence and educational orientations (Harrison, 1969; Picou, 1973); and significant other influence and educational orientations (Haller and Butterworth, 1960; Bordua, 1960; Slocum, 1967; Duncan, Haller and Portes, 1968; Woelfel and Haller, 1971 and Picou, 1973).

[2] Yetman and Eitzen (1971:509 - 517) have cogently pointed out that Black Collegiate basketball players are overpresented in the "star athlete" category and underpresented in the "average" athlete category. These findings coincide with Rosenblatt's (1967) analysis of major league baseball teams.

[3] "High" educational achievement of parents was operationalized as degrees beyond high school; "high" school performance was operationalized as a grade point average of 2.5 or better; "high" encouragement of parents and teachers was operationalized as encouragement or strong encouragement; "high" peer plans was operationalized as most of my friends are planning to attend college.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Zero-Order Correlations for Respondents by Race

	Blacks N=242										Whites N=884	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	V	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5	X_6	X_7	X_8	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Father's Ed. (X_1)	7.18	4.19	X_1	1.00	.53	.25	.16	.30	.17	.09	.36	12.06	3.79
Mother's Ed. (X_2)	8.66	3.74	X_2	.54	1.00	.25	.15	.22	.18	.17	.31	11.89	2.85
Parents' Enc. (X_3)	3.99	.95	X_3	.11	.14	1.00	.48	.21	.30	.05	.39	4.32	.82
Teachers' Enc. (X_4)	3.82	.94	X_4	.12	.11	.53	1.00	.21	.20	.09	.27	4.14	.83
Peer Plans(X_5)	.45	.50	X_5	.21	.23	.17	.13	1.00	.21	.22	.46	.75	.43
School Performance(X_6)	2.41	.58	X_6	.18	.23	.14	.07	.08	1.00	.15	.38	2.59	.65
Athletic Success(X_7)	1.20	1.08	X_7	.06	.13	.00	.00	.08	.14	1.00	.16	1.04	1.04
Educational Aspiration(X_8)	3.40	2.60	X_8	.18	.25	.20	.09	.40	.36	.19	1.00	4.08	2.43

TABLE: 2 Partial Correlation Analysis of Athletic Success-Educational Aspiration Relationship

	Blacks	Whites
Zero-Order relationship	.186	.165
First-Order Partials, controlling for:		
Father's Education	.179	.142
Mother's Education	.161	.121
Parents' Encouragement	.190	.157
Teachers' Encouragement	.187	.146
School Performance	.145	.118
Peer Plans	.169	.072
Second-Order Partials, controlling for:		
Fathers' and Mothers' Education	.162	.124
School Performance and Peer Plans	.128	.040
Third-Order Partials, controlling for:		
Mothers' Education, School Performance and Peer Plans	.120	.018

TABLE: 3 Mean Level of Educational Aspiration By Race and Predisposition Toward College Training

Category	Blacks $\bar{X}$	Whites $\bar{X}$
Predisposed Athlete	4.33	4.63
Predisposed Non-Athlete	3.38	4.20
Non-disposed Athlete	2.62	2.37
Non-disposed Non-Athlete	1.75	1.27

TABLE: 4 Regression Coefficients in Standardized and Unstandardized Form For Predictor Variables by Race

Independent Variable and Control Category	Aspiration
Blacks	
Father's Education	-.003 (-.005)
Mother's Education	.065 (.093)
Parents' Educational Encouragement	.287 (.105)
Teachers' Educational Encouragement	-.109 (-.040)
School Performance	1.310 (.290)*
Peer Plans	1.744 (.335)*
Athletic Success	.258 (.108)*
R^2	.30
Whites	
Father's Education	.092 (.144)*
Mother's Education	.063 (.073)*
Parents' Educational Encouragement	.560 (.188)*
Teachers' Educational Encouragement	.095 (.033)
School Performance	.888 (.236)*
Peer Plans	1.589 (.282)*
Athletic Success	.066 (.028)
R^2	.38

*$Pr(B \leq 0) \leq .05$ - One Tail Test

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